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NSC BRIEFING

13 May 1954

DIA and DOS review(s) completed. INDOCHINA MILITARY

I. It generally accepted fact that war in Indochina will be won or lost in Tonkin delta.

A. Militarily, its control means hold on most densely populated (7,000,000) area.

1. It contains second best seaport in Indochina and four of the six major airfields.

B. Economically, Viet Minh capture would give it light industrial facilities which far beyond what it now has.

1. Also, delta normally produces about 2,000,000 tons rice annually.

C. Psychologically, it is traditional center of nationalism in Vietnam and its loss would deal heavy blow to anti-Communist morale in rest of Vietnam.

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IV. The American army attaché in Saigon believes that entire Dien Bien Phu force can return to delta, combat-ready, by 2 June. Thus over *regular* 40 battalions could be brought to bear on the delta, both from the outside and within; in addition to these regular troops, there would be reserves of regional forces, now reportedly ordered north of delta for training.

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- A. The army attaché expects the Viet Minh to move swiftly and attempt with maximum strength to force decision in delta before intense rains bog down operations, around 15 July.
- B. Our American military observers in Saigon believe control of delta airfields is key to this struggle; if airfields are lost, Hanoi, like other strongholds, will become another Dien Bien Phu.
- C. Although enemy movement from Dien Bien Phu not yet discerned, air observation shows that Viet Minh has abandoned its AA emplacements.

V. Viet Minh now has 37mm AA guns protecting its supply route from Caobang southward toward the delta,

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VII. In Cambodia, invasion in early April by two regular Viet Minh battalions upset delicate balance between Cambodian army and enemy guerrillas.

A. Shift of Cambodian units to meet threat in northeast exposed south and central portions of country to increased enemy harassment.

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- B. General O'Daniel, after 10-11 May visit to Phnom Penh, commented on strong defensive-mindedness of Cambodians ^(Result French advice) ~~(engineered by French)~~ and failure of Cambodians to view Viet Minh threat ^{as would be} ~~in true~~ ^{expected of an} ~~light of nation~~ invaded. *nation*
- C. O'Daniel believes Cambodians must form three light divisions by November, otherwise country will be under heavy Viet Minh invasion.

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VIII. Laniel, in an apparent reversal of French strategy, this week told Dillon in Paris that the French might be forced to withdraw completely from Laos and Cambodia in order to protect key areas of Vietnam.

- A. Such a withdrawal from Laos would deliver that country to the Viet Minh in short order.
- B. Cambodia could be expected to oppose the Viet Minh ~~vigilantly~~ in the hope of US technical aid. But any Viet Minh intervention in division strength would bring about its quick collapse.